

LIP Success in Massachusetts

Poverty Mountain, Amherst, MA

Personal History:

Kevin and Cynthia Weir live on the family farm in Western Massachusetts. Cynthia's father, Walter Banfield, PhD and his wife purchased the 350-acre farm in 1950. After Walter passed away, Kevin and his wife were the last heirs to the farm. They were not farmers, loggers, or land owners.

Kevin and his wife Cynthia decided to move to the farm. After some time the house was reconstructed and they found themselves faced with maintaining the land with basically no discretionary money. They had a new mortgage from house repairs. They both had to continue working their jobs outside of our land stewardship activities. So on weekends and late evenings, they taught themselves how to operate the tractor, back hoe, and brush hog and spent a great deal of time mowing, clearing the quickly encroaching forest and repairing the deteriorating bridges, barns, equipment, and fields.

Contributions to Wildlife:



Wildlife has always been important to the Weirs. The land was protected from development by an APR restriction and enrolled in the Chapter 61 forest management program. The forest management plan is focused on maintaining the property with best practices for wildlife and forest health.

Kevin consulted a local naturalist, John Foster, who designed a large bat shed on the property. The shed was constructed with rafters from an old barn that had to be torn down. It turned out that the barn was nest to over 1,000 little brown bats using the barn roof as a maternal roost. This shed is now home to close to 500 plus female bats and their young every spring, summer and fall.

The Weirs allow the public to hike on their property, but have restricted access to their fields during the grassland bird nesting season which has led to a major increase in breeding ruffed grouse and woodcock. But they had not seen the grassland birds they

expected to see. Kevin and Cynthia took advantage of an opportunity to improve their efforts with some help from MassWildlife

The Weirs have been involved with MassWildlife's LIP Program for the past 2 years and have applied for a third year of funding. They have reclaimed 37-acres of grassland for grassland birds by restoring the original edges of the field, planting native grass seed and delaying haying until after the birds have fledged. They have also taken on the mission of removing the invasive plants that are on the property. Kevin himself has put in well over 200 hrs of his own time over the past 2 years into the project.

Kevin's passion for his project attracted attention. His neighbors asked what he was doing. So Kevin organized an informal meeting with all of his neighbors and adjacent farms to meet with MassWildlife's LIP Coordinator to discuss how they can tailor their practices for the benefit of wildlife. The Weir's also hosted a LIP Field Day where Kevin and Cynthia opened up their property to interested landowners to walk the property, learn what he had done and converse about others projects, techniques and wildlife sightings. It was greatly attended by USFWS service employees, state officials, local government representatives and landowners from as far away as Cape Cod.



The result of Kevin and Cynthia's work has been positive. Species of birds that haven't been heard in many years are already starting to use the areas that were restored. Kevin has seen an increase in woodcock and grouse, as well as heard northern bobwhite. Last June, Kevin invited the Northampton Bird Club to visit the site and they identified 53 species of birds including highlights such as: wood peewees, ovenbirds, black-throated green warblers, black-throated blue warblers, red shouldered hawk, veerys, red eye vireos, scarlet tanagers, pine warblers, cedar waxwings and many species of woodpeckers.

Significance of Contributions:

Kevin and Cynthia are private landowners that inherited a farm they could not afford and could not maintain. Instead of selling the 350-acres to make a lucrative profit, they protected the property from development with an APR and enrolled in Chapter 61 for their forested land. Kevin and Cynthia have gone above and beyond what was expected of a normal landowner. They educated themselves on techniques and resources that benefited wildlife. They have and continue to take steps to create and maintain habitat that is in decline in Massachusetts and are in-turn helping to conserve species at risk that depend on that habitat for breeding. To recognize their efforts for wildlife, the Weirs were awarded the Certificate of Recognition by the New England Chapter of The Wildlife Society in 2007.